

To Whom it May Concern

My name is Vanessa Hawke. I am a voter from Southington. I am writing to submit testimony in support of passing HB 6578, even though improvement is necessary. Establishing and expanding automatic voter registration beyond the DMV will save money and allows more people to access their right to vote - we should be removing as many barriers as possible and allowing more people to participate in our democracy. This is common sense, and efforts to inhibit access to voting seem suspect and antithetical to American values.

I am in favor of AVR through the DMV being signed into law, however, it is obvious that we must also expand AVR to the Department of Social Services, HUSKY, state colleges and universities, Access Health CT, and other state agencies. We must make it as easy as possible for people to access their right to vote.

AVR will enhance the security and integrity of our elections by eliminating outdated addresses and duplicative registrations through an automatic process—which will deliver the most accurate voter rolls to cities and towns. Eliminating duplicate registrations significantly reduces the workload for localities that could be susceptible to confusion on election day. A significant majority of CT voters support AVR. Electronic voter registration saves money. And almost 20 other states are already implementing AVR in some way.

We must also restore the right to vote to people who are reintegrating into their communities on parole. Denying the right to vote to people who have paid their debt to society is wrong, plain and simple. But more than that, disenfranchising people on parole sustains Connecticut's racist system of inequality. People who are on parole are concentrated in communities with significant Black and Latino populations - due to structural racism in our criminal justice system - and because of this, those communities with higher numbers of BIPOC residents are not given fair representation. Connecticut is the only state in the Northeast that still denies people on parole the right to vote. The practice of denying the right to vote to those with a felony conviction was the result of Confederate states looking for a way to deny political power to the Black community and circumvent Reconstruction amendments. By restoring the right to vote to people on parole, Connecticut could join 20 other states in righting one small, but significant, wrong. If the point of incarceration is to rehabilitate the incarcerated person, they should be allowed to access their rights immediately upon release. Denying access to those rights undermines any attempts they can make towards reintegrating into society. It unfairly decreases the voting power of their communities. It is unjust and it needs to change.

Additionally, I am writing in favor of passing SB 1017. Voters should be able to retain the freedom they had in 2020 to use their town's official, secure ballot drop boxes.

I urge you to pass HB 6578 but with expansion of Automatic Voter Registration beyond the Dept. of Motor Vehicles to other state agencies—and I urge you to pass SB 1017.

Thank you,

Vanessa Hawke,
Southington

